

Dual Minority Statuses: The Intersection of Race/ethnicity¹ and Sexual Orientation

While individuals of one identifiable minority status (e.g., racial/ethnic) may experience issues that practitioners need to be prepared to address, the issues can become even more complicated for individuals of two minority statuses. For individuals of a racial/ethnic *and* sexual minority status² (i.e., gay, lesbian, bisexual), this seems especially true. In addition to discrimination, the individuals may be simultaneously confronting issues related to both minority statuses. Practitioners need to be aware of the relevant issues in order to effectively provide services to these “multiple minorities” (Sue & Sue, 2013). The purpose of this paper is to highlight the significant issues facing individuals of dual racial/ethnic and sexual minority statuses (RESM) and offer recommendations to practitioners.

Racial/ethnic Minority Issues

For racial/ethnic minorities, racial identity development is arguably the most widely studied topic. Cross’s (1991) model of identity development for African Americans describes how African Americans progress through a series of stages, from an unhealthy stage to a healthy stage. It has inspired other models of identity development (e.g., Atkinson, Morten and Sue, 1998). Acculturation is also relevant, referring to the process of change that happens when two cultures interact (Berry & Sam, 1997). For example, an individual may immigrate to the U. S. and *assimilate*, meaning that the culture of origin is lost. Another issue of relevance to racial/ethnic minorities is cultural mistrust (Terrell & Terrell, 1981). Although defined as African Americans’ mistrust of Whites, Bell and Tracey (2006) suggest that it is not unique to African Americans.

¹ Although race and ethnicity are not identical, I am listing them as one minority status for simplicity.

² Although transgender is generally included when discussing individuals who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual, I chose to not include it. Transgender is not tied to sexual orientation and their issues are quite different.

Sexual Minority Issues

Similar to racial/ethnic minorities, sexual minorities may go through a series of stages related to sexual identity development (e.g., Cass, 1984). A critical decision that sexual minorities must address is disclosing their status to others. This coming out process can be a struggle, with individuals often experiencing isolation (Sue & Sue, 2013). Furthermore, suicide is a concern for sexual minority youth. Attempted suicides are five times more likely to occur among sexual minority youth compared to heterosexual youth, particularly in the absence of a supportive environment (Hatzenbeuhler, 2011).

Intersection of Issues

As previously noted, individuals who are a RESM may be struggling with multiple issues simultaneously. For example, a person may be dealing with racial identity and sexual identity concerns. The person may also experience discrimination, not just for one status, but for both. Another relevant issue is the homophobia that exists within certain racial/ethnic groups (Battle, Cohen, Warren, Gergerson, & Audam, 2002; Estrada, Rigali-Oiler, Arciniega, & Tracey, 2011). As a result, when coming out, individuals may not find the support they expect from members of their same race/ethnicity.

Recommendation to Practitioners

There are three key recommendations. First, practitioners must recognize biases they have (Sue & Sue, 2013). Second, they should familiarize themselves with the issues previously described, such as racial and sexual identity development. Third, they should note that identity can be very *fluid*, varying according to the situation. Alston, Bell, and Feist-Price (1996) noted this in the case of African Americans with disabilities. In other words, there may be situations when the person of a RESM is more focused on his/her race/ethnicity than sexual orientation.

Paying attention to these and other issues should allow for effective work with individuals seeking services.

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